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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4770
INFO RUEHBS/AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS 0146
RUEHJB/AMEMBASSY BUJUMBURA 0152
RUEHDR/AMEMBASSY DAR ES SALAAM 0965
RUEHKM/AMEMBASSY KAMPALA 1721
RUEHKI/AMEMBASSY KINSHASA 0294
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 0114
RUEHNR/AMEMBASSY NAIROBI 1019
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 0334
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TAGS: PREF PREL PHUM RW
SUBJECT: 2200 RWANDANS RETURN FROM UGANDA

REF: KAMPALA 1542

Classified By: Ambassador Michael R. Arietti, reason 1.4 (B/D)

¶1. (SBU) Summary. Post has confirmed recent press reports of the repatriation of approximately 2200 Rwandans who had settled in the Kibati region of Uganda, near the Tanzanian border. Most press accounts depicted forced movement on little notice although the pro-government New Times offered accounts of a long-anticipated journey home by a willing and readied population. The governments of Rwanda and Uganda jointly carried out the repatriation, and while each described a peaceful process, it was not a voluntary movement of the camp population (reftel). All have apparently been sent to their home communities for resettlement. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) Following media reports about the repatriation of 2200 Rwandans from Uganda, Embassy personnel spoke with Innocent Ngango, Executive Secretary of the Rwandan National Council for Refugees, about the details of the return process. Ngango said 586 men, 516 women, and 1117 children were repatriated, more than 80 percent of whom were from the former Kibungo prefecture. Some had originally fled to Tanzania in the aftermath of the 1994 genocide, then moved to Uganda in 2001 when their refugee status was revoked, and others arrived in Kibati by other routes and at other times. He further reported that all of the returnees have already been resettled in their home villages after stays of two to three days in the Rukomo Transit Center near Gicumbi District (near the town of Byumba). According to Ngango, the returnees will receive no further assistance in reintegrating into their former communities, although the Rwandan Foreign Minister stated publicly that some assistance would be offered.

¶3. (C) The deportation agreement was reached by the governments of Rwanda and Uganda in a July tripartite meeting attended by UNHCR, which agreed to assist "on humanitarian grounds." Ngango said the government of Rwanda (GOR) had years of reports concerning the recruiting efforts by the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) among the largely Hutu group at the camp in Uganda, and the possible presence of individuals who had participated in the 1994 genocide. Crimes supposedly committed by the returnees against the local Ugandan community served as further reason on the Ugandan side, he said, for their return. A representative from UNHCR who attended the July meeting told PolOff that the repatriation called for in the agreement was "not necessarily voluntary," but officials from both

governments and the UNHCR have "taken the public position that it was." (FYI. Point 7 of the joint communiqu issued after the July meeting says, "In cooperation with the Government of Rwanda, the Government of Uganda shall facilitate the repatriation of the 'Kibati' caseload within one month (August 2007)." End FYI.)

¶4. (C) Because the returnees were not granted refugee status at any time during their stay in Uganda, they were not under UNHCR's mandate, a situation described by the UNHCR representative as a "failure" of the organization to resolve status disputes years earlier. The governments of Rwanda and Uganda did not coordinate the repatriation with UNHCR, according to UNHCR and other embassy contacts, and neither UNHCR or other organizations took part. UNHCR and other refugee organizations were informed of the arrival of returnees only after they reached the Rukomo Transit Center on the Rwandan side of the border. UNHCR provided some humanitarian assistance in the form of water tanks for the center when contacted by the GOR. Separately, UNHCR head Annette Nyekan told embassy officers that "several thousand" Kibati camp inhabitants had escaped the roundup, having left the camp in the days before the return exercise.

¶5. (SBU) Comment. The assessment of the repatriation by UNHCR Uganda seems to be a bit more positive than UNHCR Rwanda (reftel). The limited involvement of UNHCR was understandable given the returnees' non-refugee status. The Ugandan government has long wished to expel this population from its territory, and the GOR, with doubts of its own regarding activities at the camp, agreed to the return. The success of the repatriation depends ultimately on the returnees' reception in their home communities and the extent of assistance available to them. End comment.

ARIETTI